

Ray, Convicted Assassin of King, in Coma

From Associated Press

NASHVILLE—James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., lay in a coma Tuesday as civil rights leaders held out hope for a deathbed confession confirming their long-held suspicions he did not act alone.

Ray, serving a 99-year prison sentence for the 1968 slaying, was in the last stages of cirrhosis of the liver despite never having drank or smoked, said his brother Jerry Ray. The 68-year-old convict was in critical condition.

Jerry Ray said he gave doctors permission not to try to resuscitate his brother if his heart stopped. "I think he'll be gone in 24 hours. I really do," Jerry Ray said.

There has long been speculation that Ray did not act alone, and civil rights leaders said they hoped that before he dies, he tells everything he knows about the assassination.

"I think he would do a lot for his soul and his salvation if he confessed all that he knows before his lips are sealed forever," said the Rev. Joseph Lowery, who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with King.

"I don't think he had the intelli-

gence to plan, orchestrate, and execute any such action. I don't think he was capable of doing it. He may or may not know exactly who used him, but I think he knows more than he has revealed."

King was cut down by a sniper on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., where the civil rights leader had gone to support a strike by sanitation workers. The assassination touched off race riots in more than 100 cities.

Ray, a petty criminal, pleaded guilty but recanted three days later and spent much of his time since then filing a barrage of appeals.

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1996

NATION

TENNESSEE

King Assassin Ray Is Hospitalized

James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., has been hospitalized, officials said. Neither Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital officials nor state Corrections Department spokeswoman Pam Gehman would comment on Ray's condition. Nashville television station WSMY reported he was near death. It did not identify its source. Gehman said Ray had been transferred from Riverbend State Prison in Nashville to the Columbia facility. Ray, 68, pleaded guilty in the April 4, 1968, slaying of King in Memphis. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison.

From Times Staff and Wire Reports



Associated Press

HOSPITALIZED—James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was near death suffering from liver failure. Above, Ray in 1991. A19

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